

RPG Reload Special Edition – ‘RPG Reload’s Favorite RPGs Of 2015’

[January 2, 2016](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)

Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to yet another special edition of the **RPG Reload**. In this weekly feature, we usually take a look at a game from the App Store’s past, but due to the New Year’s holiday, we’re doing something a little different this week. That’s right, it’s time for the second annual listing of the **RPG Reload**’s favorite RPGs of the year. I thought it might be cool to come up with a catchy name for these prizes, but since I couldn’t come up with anything good, I’ve settled on calling them the *Golden Pancho Awards*, in honor of the frequently-seen Kemco monster. No actual trophies yet, unfortunately, but ‘*Golden Pancho*’ sounds a lot better than trying to spell out the whole article name, right?

To repeat myself a little bit from last year’s awards, I know we already did some Best Of articles here at TouchArcade, but RPGs are what the **Reload** is all about, so I want to give them some special attention. There were tons of cool RPGs again this year, so paring that list down was as difficult as ever. Like before, I’ve separated games into ports and originals in the interests of fairness, and included a third category for more under-the-radar releases.

The rules are the same as last year. Three lists, each with five entries. We’ve got **Best RPG Ports**, **Best Original RPGs**, and **Best Sleepers**. Each series is allowed only one spot to keep certain genre elephants from trampling everything else. The lists are not ranked, but simply presented in alphabetical order. The **Best Ports** prize is not solely or even substantially based on the quality of the port itself, but rather how good the overall package is. These lists are nothing more than my own opinions, and by no means have I listed every excellent RPG that came out this year because that, my friends, would be bananas. Without further ado, let’s check out the

RPG Reload Golden Pancho Award winners for 2015!

The 2015 RPG Reload Golden Panchos For Ported RPGs

DRAGON QUEST V, \$14.99 We didn't have quite the feast of *Dragon Quest* games this year that we did in 2014, but the ones we got were excellent. *Dragon Quest 5* is my favorite game in the series, and one of my favorite RPGs of all-time, thanks to its superb story, interesting cast of characters, and sprawling quest. As the series is often wont to, *Dragon Quest 5* has some ideas about the nature of a hero, and what that actually means. The gameplay is familiar and fun, and the tale it spins has rarely been matched by other JRPGs even more than 20 years later. If you only ever play one *Dragon Quest* game, this is the one you should be playing.

Dust: An Elysian Tail, \$5.99 *Dust: An Elysian Tail* was one of the best games I played on iOS this year. The production values are outstanding, the gameplay is challenging and enjoyable, and the size of the adventure dwarfs most other stabs at the action-RPG genre on mobile. It's always a gamble when a game moves from a controller with a ton of buttons to touch controls, and doubly so when it's an action game, but *Dust* made the trip to iOS without so much as even tousling its hair. One of the marks of a great game is that it's fun even if all you're doing is running the character around in the environment, and it's a quality *Dust* can claim for itself handily.

Legend of Grimrock, \$4.99 *The Legend Of Grimrock* is a wonderful combination of the classic and the modern. Calling back to the period in the early 90s when games like *Dungeon Master* and *Eye Of The Beholder* ruled the roost, *Grimrock* is a dream come true for fans of dungeon crawlers. It infuses the idea behind those classics with plenty of modern touches to create a brilliant RPG with an old soul. The transition to iOS was virtually flawless, though it is a little bit crowded on devices with smaller screens.

Sproggiewood, \$4.99 There were a lot of roguelikes released again this year

on iOS, but the one that truly stuck with me was *Sproggewood*. When I played it for the review, I honestly didn't expect to keep on playing it for the rest of the year, but that's exactly what happened. There's just something about how approachable yet challenging it is, and I like how the different classes provide some fun variety for replays. I have to tip my hat to the difficulty balancing, as the game becomes an entirely different beast depending on which mode you play on. It's tough enough for veterans when you play the highest difficulty, but friendly enough for newcomers on easy.

[Ys Chronicles 1, \\$4.99](#) Considering it's one of the great-grandparents of the action-RPG genre, the first Ys game holds up surprisingly well in the modern age. Of course, *Chronicles* is a remake that improves considerably upon the original release, but at its core, this isn't terribly different from the game that started it all. Thrilling action, a sensational soundtrack, and some legendary boss battles make this one of the most fast-paced and enjoyable action-RPGs on iOS. Let's hope these Ys ports keep coming from DotEmu, because it only gets better from here.

The 2015 RPG Reload Golden Panchos For Original RPGs

[Attack the Light, \\$2.99](#) Please do not burn me at the stake, but I am not a Steven Universe fan. I've never even seen the show, which shouldn't be too surprising as I live in Japan. I'm told it's quite good, though. Why do I say this? Because it shows that *Attack The Light* is a good game, regardless of whether or not you are a fan of these characters. It describes itself as a Light RPG, and I'm okay with that description. The story is barely there, and dungeon exploration is a matter of quick swipes and taps. The combat system is surprisingly deep, however, taking a page from Nintendo's *Mario* RPGs with timing-based skills and mini-games. You won't need to use most of the options open to you, mind you, but the game makes a good effort to keep things interesting for its relatively short running time by presenting enemy groups that require you to change tactics now and then.

CHAOS RINGS â...¢, \$19.99 On careful consideration, *Chaos Rings* 3 is probably the best original JRPG ever released for iOS. While the other *Chaos Rings* games are excellent, they always felt like they were being put together on a shoe-string budget. I won't say *Chaos Rings* 3 is quite console-quality in that regard, but it's probably as close to it as Square Enix has gotten with a mobile game. With an epic story, a massive amount of content to enjoy, and gameplay systems that dance on the knife edge of complex and comprehensible, *Chaos Rings* 3 is the kind of release mobile JRPG fans have waited a long time for. Unfortunately, if you have iOS 9, you'll have to wait a bit longer, since the game is currently in need of a fix. Still, I have no doubts that Square Enix will update it, so you shouldn't let that deter you from this amazing effort.

Galactic Keep, \$3.99 *Galactic Keep* certainly made for some laughs in the meeting room at TouchArcade Towers. When I was assigned the game, I came back shortly after to complain about it, expressing my dislike for it on almost every level. A few hours later, I returned to the meeting room absolutely gushing about the game. I think one of the things that I found daunting initially but attractive in the long run was the sheer scale of the experience. In using board game visuals, your brain might think about the game in terms of board game dimensions, but *Galactic Keep* is bigger and more open than just about any board game would dare to be. It might be a little weird at first, but once you get into its way of thinking, it's hard to stop playing. There is apparently another module coming in 2016 for the game, and I'll be setting aside a few days to happily soak it in.

Sorcery! 3, \$4.99 Developer inkle keeps upping the ante with each adaptation of Steve Jackson's classic *Sorcery!* gamebooks. *Sorcery!* 3 has a much bigger vision than the prior installments, creating something that a physical book couldn't feasibly do without losing its roots. Taking a somewhat dry middle chapter and turning it into a massive role-playing adventure was a nifty trick, and that time travel idea is excellent in both its conception and implementation. It's almost too non-linear at times, and it

takes a clever, lucky player to see it through to its conclusion, but as a marriage of interactive fiction and RPG, it's one of the most impressive examples yet. It will be interesting to see what inkle does for the fourth and final part of this series.

Templar Battleforce Elite, \$9.99 Of all the strategy RPGs released this year, *Templar Battleforce* marks down the highest scores across the board, and that was no mean feat. The gameplay is accessible, the customization options are deep, and the maps and enemy layouts do a superb job of keeping the player on their toes. The AI might not be as clever as in some other games, but the game manages to be a blast anyway. That's not even mentioning how much game there is to play here, with the amount of missions doubling up on a lot of full-priced console strategy games. The Trese Brothers really knocked it out of the park with this one.

The 2015 RPG Reload Golden Panchos For "Sleeper" RPGs

Dark Fear, \$2.99 *Dark Fear* is weird, there's no doubt about that. As a hybrid of point and click adventures and RPGs, there are surprisingly few useful points of reference to help explain it. Imagine *Quest For Glory* draped in a horror motif, and you'll be on your way, I suppose. While *Dark Fear* probably leans more on the adventure side of things than the RPG end, it features equipment upgrades, consumable items, a functioning economy, and turn-based battles, so I think it has a lot of appeal for RPG fans who are willing to try something a little off the beaten path. Just be careful, as it does make use of the occasional jump scare.

Demon's Rise, \$7.99 *Demon's Rise* is not the most balanced strategy RPG, nor does it have the best story or the shiniest presentation. It takes a fairly orthodox approach to tactical RPGs and then slathers on a ton of content, including a healthy amount of missions and what is, I think, the largest and most-varied playable cast in any strategy RPG I've had the pleasure of playing. For the price the developer is charging, it's almost an absurd value,

particularly in light of how many free, substantial updates he's delivered since releasing the game. It might be a little rough around the edges, but it's time well-spent for anyone who loves a good turn-based bash.

Hero Emblems, \$2.99 Given the amount of match-3 water that has passed beneath the TouchArcade bridge, it takes something really special for a game of that type to get noticed. *Hero Emblems* is quite a special game indeed, mixing in some intriguing RPG elements and some (perhaps unintentionally) hilarious dialogue. The balancing gets a little dicey at times, but if you're looking for a quality match-3 RPG with no IAP strings attached, I'm not sure you can find any better than *Hero Emblems* on iOS.

The Last Warlock, \$3.99 I know, there are a lot of strategy RPGs this time around, but it was a great year for them. If nothing else, I can promise you haven't played one quite like *The Last Warlock* before. Most strategy RPGs are fairly strict about coloring inside the lines of the genre. It's a genre where steady balancing is a lofty ideal that most developers aspire to and many players expect. *The Last Warlock* is not interested in your rules. It gives you the keys to your father's prized Ferrari and encourages you to launch it at passing helicopters, if such a thing should strike your fancy. You're not only given the tools to be creative, you're actively encouraged to use them to try and get one over on your opponent, leading to some truly awe-inspiring battle stories.

Lowlander, \$1.99 There are tons of games that pay homage to the classics, but the truth is that very few of them manage turn out to be better than their source while simultaneously hitting most of the same notes. *Lowlander* can count itself among that small few. Admittedly, improving on *Ultima* 2 is probably an easier task than, say, taking aim at *Chrono Trigger*, but you have to give developer Flat Black credit. This is early *Ultima* the way we would all *like* to remember it, rather than how early *Ultima* actually is. It's a tasty meal for anyone with fond memories of those trailblazing titles.

Congratulations to the games that made the list. It was another tough competition this year, and the final cuts to bring the lists down to five each were not made lightly. Congratulations are also in order to any developer, big or small, who put in the hard work and effort to release an RPG this year. Even if your game isn't appearing on year-end lists, simply getting such a big endeavor completed is worthy of praise. Thank you once more for giving players like me so many exciting quests to tackle.

It has been my absolute pleasure to cover the mobile RPG beat for another year, and I'm looking forward to seeing what 2016 will bring. I have a hunch we'll be seeing more of *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* from Square Enix, and perhaps the *Sword Of Mana* remake, as well. The new *Baldur's Gate: Siege Of Dragonspear*, *Ys Chronicles 2*, and *Avadon 3* might be on the horizon. Kemco will surely be there with more of their RPGs, and *Titan Quest*, *9th Dawn 2*, and the new *Adventure To Fate* game should all arrive early in the next year. Who knows, maybe this will be the year for *Sword Of Fargoal 2* and the new *Solomon* game? Only time will tell.

As my final sign-off for the year 2015, I'd like to thank each and every one of you yet again, gentle readers. The **RPG Reload** feature has been going on strong this year, and your generous support both as readers and Patreon backers has made it possible for the feature to stretch its legs a little. It couldn't happen without all of you. Thank you for sharing in my adventures with me, and I look forward to another 50 or so in the next year to come. Now, with that said, it's time to let me know what *your* favorite RPGs of 2015 were. You can do that by commenting below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or by sending out a tweet to me at [@RPGReload](#). As for me, I'll be back next week with the next part of our *History Of Handheld RPGs* monthly feature. Have a happy and safe New Year, friends, and as always, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload: *The History Of Handheld RPGs, Part Five*